

IMPRESSIONS & REFLECTIONS

Outcome of a visit to the MIT Museum and Dinner at the MIT Stella Room (7-338)

on February 23, 2011 as part of the

RCC/MIT SPURS-Humphrey Collaboration

by Participants from Roxbury Community College

April 4, 2011

RCC/MIT SPURS-Humphrey Collaboration
February 23, 2011
Stella Room (7-338)

ITINERARY and AGENDA

- 3:00PM – 4:30PM MIT Museum
 Assemble in Lobby – led by Paula Moreno (SPURS Fellow from Colombia)
 Introduction – MIT Curator, Debbie Douglas
 265 Massachusetts Ave. (N52), Cambridge, MA 02139
- 5:00PM – 5:15PM Arrival & dinner
 Stella Room (Rm. 7-338)
 Department of Urban Studies and Planning
 77 Massachusetts Ave., MA 02139
 (<http://whereis.mit.edu/>)
- 5:15PM – 5:30PM Introductions
 Bish Sanyal (SPURS)
 Jose Alicea (RCC)
 RCC Faculty
 Goals and Expectations of RCC/SPURS Collaboration
- 5:30PM – 5:45PM Discussions MIT SPURS Fellows/RCC students
- 6:00PM – 6:30PM Christopher M. Jones, MIT Associate Dean for Graduate Students
 Topic: The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Inc. (DSNI)
- 6:30PM – 7:00PM Q&A

***** Dean Jose Alicea's cell phone # 617-671-8541 *****

Ref13ctions and Impressions

Jose A. Alicea

RCC Staff

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for a great time at MIT! So far, all enjoyed a great time and we met some wonderful people. The emergent themes continue to captivate and motivate me.

I'm sure the notes taken will not do justice to the dialogue; we were just too involved in it. So in order to capture the nuances of the day, please write a short reflection piece on your impressions of the day at MIT. This can be in any literary form. In addition, please contact your participating students and have them submit a reflective impression also. I'll compile and share them with our RCC group and with MIT. We can refer to the compilation as a stand-alone document or use it as data for a larger scholarly work. You may send the pieces as Word attachments.

I'm really excited about this project, especially working with you.

Thanks,

Jose

Introduction to the Poem (below) and Collaboration

Rhonda Gray
RCC Faculty

“The Mandela Plan” offers a literary perspective of the initial meeting to explore collaborations between Roxbury Community College (RCC) and MIT SPURS. The title of the poem alludes to a presentation made at the meeting by Christopher Jones, Assistant Dean for Graduate Education at MIT, who examined the process used by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) to revitalize the Roxbury community when it was in financial and environmental distress during the 1980s. DSNI’s commitment to community-based leadership created a spirit of activism that was echoed by many Roxbury residents who petitioned to secede from Boston and be called “Mandela, Massachusetts.” A similar charge to be a leader in academia and in urban planning was a theme at the meeting and reflected in the biographies of those who attended. Also, DSNI’s goal to create lasting inroads within the community was demonstrated by the emerging partnership between RCC and MIT SPURS. Furthermore, the poem captures the enthusiasm of the meeting participants as we enter the planning stage of a partnership that will launch in fall 2011.

The Mandela Plan

(inspired by a collaboration between MIT SPURS and RCC)

Rhonda Gray
RCC Faculty

How does a whisper spin into a twister
Ready to reassemble a razed nation?

How does a droplet pour into the ocean
Birthing fathom-heavy fountains of wisdom?

At MIT
One night
We mused o’er these queries
While the conductor fine-tuned
A concerto sweetened by love
And food
At the dinner table.

He presented
A sumptuous spread of delights
Giving us the excuse to delight
In
Each other.

The art on the walls couldn’t
Rival the walking art
Whose colorful perspectives
Made prismatic landscapes
Of realities
Unknown.

However,
 The **distiller** of **sonic** colors coerced us to
 See the black and white lines that
 Etched our lives creating
 Borders
 Boundaries and
 Lies
 About our capabilities
 To secede and succeed
 As a Mandela tribe.

Wearing decorative stripes
 Flashing amidst Boston's pipeline
 Of innovation, leadership, and creative genius
 We created a Mandela skyline
 One
 Brick
 At
 A
 Time
 At the dinner table.

How does a whisper spin into a twister
 Ready to reassemble a razed nation?

How does a droplet pour into the ocean
 Birthing fathom-heavy fountains of wisdom?

Ask the dinner guests...they know.
 But, hey!
 Weren't you there, too,
 Enjoying the conductor's flow?
 It's not enough to bear witness
 To a revolution.
 You must create a plan;
 Be the solution by laying
 One
 Brick
 At
 A
 Time.

Notes:

1. Key letters are in bold in the phrase "**distiller** of **sonic**" to reflect the acronym for Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.
2. "Mandela tribe" refers to Roxbury's attempt to secede from Boston, Massachusetts creating its own city named "Mandela."

MIT SPURS/RCC Collaboration Present and Future

Nasreen Latif
RCC Faculty

Our kickoff session was great! The host, the conversation and the presentation were excellent. Using my background and experience, I can connect myself, my students and the research fellows smoothly with the SPURS program in the near future. I will be teaching the Environmental Issues: Honors Colloquium and Urban Economics (with Honors and online components) courses in Fall 2011. I am bringing our Urban Economics course back after ten plus years because this course perfectly matches up with the MIT SPURS program. I have already worked on this course and am taking care of the marketing part of that particular course this Spring. In the Fall, Monday and Wednesday afternoon I will teach Environmental Issues and Tuesday and Thursday mornings I will teach Urban Economics. Both of these classes are excellent opportunities for participation.

I am looking forward to working with all of you.

Note: We are the hosting the RCC Garden Celebration, which will be held on April 28 at 12:30 pm in the cafeteria. Join the celebration and help make Roxbury a greener, healthier, stronger place!

Reflections on RCC/MIT SPURS dinner

Randy Foote

RCC Faculty

Last night's dinner was far more fruitful than I had ever imagined it would be. Our students were wonderful and our hosts were gracious. Remarkably, there was a striking and unexpected convergence between MIT Dean Chris Jones' well-researched presentation on the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and RCC Dean Alicea's personal experience of that time. In itself, that convergence points to the mutual benefit of this collaboration: MIT has world-class scholars and research facilities in urban planning, but in certain areas RCC possesses the fundamental personal urban experiences that are complementary to MIT's strengths. We at RCC have experienced first-hand some of the best – and the worst – aspects of urban planning. I think that this made a strong impression on the fellows, who generally come from countries where grassroots political participation is limited. In that respect, we have a great deal to offer the SPURS Fellows, as they have to offer our students.

I was very heartened to see our students discovering that the world represented by MIT was not at all out of their reach. Walking the Museum with them, I felt their awe in the face of the remarkable accomplishments of MIT -- Nobel Prize medals and all -- but at the dinner they began to feel that these two worlds were not so unbridgeable – that they could indeed aspire to participate on an equal footing. Our great goal at RCC is to elevate our students' horizons, and this is such an opportunity. I do not yet see the details of a program that can develop. There are many possibilities. The invitation to the fellows to join the inauguration of the RCC Urban Garden was a great beginning. I appreciate that our students will be invited to presentations at MIT. I think that guest lectures at RCC on selected topics could be of value. Perhaps there would be an opportunity for students to assist (during the school year or in the summer) in some of the research being done at the Department of Urban Studies: they would be of real help in something similar to Chris Jones' DSNi study. In addition to the invaluable exposure to MIT talent and resources, participation in this program will certainly help students on their applications to four-year colleges.

Then there is the question of how we can fashion this program to benefit the broader RCC community, beyond those students who are specifically involved in the SPURS collaboration. I think that Nasreen's ecology work dovetails very well with that in many respects. I see many opportunities on the political science front, both as regards political aspects of urban planning as well as accessing the broad international experience of the SPURS fellows. Rhonda and Bobby spoke eloquently to the natural interfaces of Urban Planning with the Arts.

But yet – I know there are more possibilities that I am not yet envisioning. This is where we need to hear from our students....

I think we should have a meeting – soon after mid-term exams -- of the faculty and students who are involved to discuss possibilities. I know that developing this program will entail a significant amount of time, but I believe that it will be well worth it. We might look toward involving a few more students-- let us discuss how many students we think should be involved. Most of all I want to hear ideas from the students as to how they see the possibilities.

This is a first pass – there is so much more to discuss. I look forward to our next meeting....Randy Foote

RE: Refl3ctions and Impressions

Robert P. Stevens

RCC Faculty

Jose, I appreciate your coordinating efforts on this project and I apologize for my tardiness here again. I'm still adjusting to my new schedule at the school.

Please pardon my turn of phrase here, but since last week I've been turned on by the thought of engaging faculty, students, and fellows in sex talk. You and I haven't talked much about my background but I think you know I come from an activist background, too. I've spent years agitating for gay freedom and raising money to publish *The Guide* magazine with its message of sexual liberation. I also recognize the explosive nature of the subject. People often get killed in this world if they have the wrong sexuality, which is all the more reason to discuss the subject of sexuality, and alternative sexuality, in an open and sane manner. I know already that RCC students have a strong interest in discussing sex because we've been talking about it in my Elements of Art and Design class this semester. Desmond Morris's Naked Ape is the springboard. Coming from a gay activist perspective as I do, my students' ideas on sexuality often seem corny and un-thought-through. Worse, discussions often reveal prejudice toward sexual minorities.

During the round table discussion at MIT last week I joked aside to RCC's Rhonda Gray and the woman Humphrey Fellow from Baghdad that I wanted to put sex on the agenda, and they both seemed to like the idea. The Fellow motioned to all those sitting around the table and suggested they'd all like to talk about sex, too! To my regret the moment passed without my raising the topic. To my surprise and delight it was Bish himself who approached me, as the meeting broke up, to raise the point that it would be good to talk about sex in the group because there are many emerging gay and lesbian communities around the world. While he and I have not yet communicated on the topic I feel strongly we will.

I was completely charmed by the people at the event. I think Bish is cool. I think the gang from Roxbury was cool too, and that we established a two-way dynamic with the MIT crew, whereby each might give and receive from the other. A talk about what's happening sexually around the world would be fascinating.

More later!

Bobby

RCC/MIT SPURS Collaboration

Tajudeen J Akinbode

RCC Student

Roxbury Community College.

A school so small but most importantly so unique.

So small in its number of student biomass,

so unique in its glorious richness of diversity.

As diverse as the planet earth, yet interdependent.

Interdependent because of the common bonds of humanity.

And of the realization that of our individual values,

irrespective of geographical variances,

are intricately entwined.

Never have I seen such a conglomeration of inquisitive minds,

From all corners of the earth,

Converge in the heart of Black Harlem,

For the purpose of learning.

Now

I can boast of having friends,

From every corner of Africa and from every cranny of the Caribbean.

Now I can claim authoritatively,

with joy unabridged,

That,

From the historic epitome of Boston's Harlem,

I interacted with people of all continents; Blacks, blues, whites, and reds

When I grow old to become a griot,

I can boast of how I came in close proximity,

With the representatives of world heritage.

I can educate younger generations about how great it felt to belong to this community.

Indeed, then I would tell them,

that,

In the heart of Roxbury,

you find in one place,

what would be hard to find in one lifetime.

What else could we have desired?

Out of the collaboration of RCC with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

What else could we have felt the need to pursue?

Other than for the doors of MIT be opened.

For its giant doors of inventive and innovative heritage,

be opened to the ever thirsty minds of Roxbury students

For through this, we may partake in dinning with the best of human minds,

when individual accomplishments in the field of technology are eulogized.

This yearning is not strikingly original,

for it is synonymous to the desire that moved Melvin H King,

to push for the establishment of the MIT's Community Fellows program,

in September 1971.

While we continue to celebrate the unique opportunities not easily seen in other community colleges,
we verily should never disregard history;
so that we would not function out of framework.

What we would then achieve,
if we do not allow the goals of founding fathers to fade before our eyes,
is that,

In addition to the diversity herein enjoyed,
the already culturally rich minds of marginalized African and Afro American descendants,
Can yet point to another unique privilege,
Of having a strong and sustained relationships,
with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Reflection

Alexander Lee

RCC Student

We live in extraordinary times. The world around us is constantly changing, but what does not change is Experience. Wednesday was another example of extraordinary events in our lives. So many people with so many backgrounds, together, anything can happen. We RCC students can take a lot from the meetings, for example; learning more about the schools origin or how the city of Roxbury came to be. Most importantly is the experience. We the students can take the experiences and knowledge's we learn from the older generation and help us create new ideas to bestow upon the world. The fellows can also learn from this event. They can fine tune and perfect their own knowledge by learning what we know and more about how organizations like DSNI came to be. I believe through precise planning and brainstorming we can help change the world.

Was it the room or the people?

Markysa O'Loughlin

RCC Student

The RCC/MIT SPURS collaboration is definitely on my list of great experiences for 2011.

As I walked in this room of a unique dimension and vibrant colors, I was impressed. I never saw any place like it before. Then along came the people. Almost instantly, the texture and color of the room were no longer impressive.

The discussion was completely dialogical from the outset. No long drawn out speeches. No ego-maniacs, no one infatuated with the sound of their own voice. Everyone wanted to hear from each other. Everyone had something relevant and important to say. I especially enjoyed Jones' presentation on the DSNi. Since I am new to Boston, it was very enlightening for me to learn about some of its rich history. The wealth of information I got need not be quantified in dollar terms, it was priceless! Indeed, it is truly remarkable when persons from different places, cultures, and ages can come together with a common goal of advancing our society. It shows that we are not so different after all, and it shows the importance of working together as a collective.

After the meeting was over, the first impression of the experience became oblivious to me because I remember nothing about the room; I only remember the people and their ideas.

Reflection

Maxwell Opara
RCC Student

Hello Mr. Alicea, this is Maxwell Opara. I attended the RCC/MIT SPURS Collaboration & Dinner last month at MIT. At the end of the event, Professor Sanyal posed possible dates in which we could all meet and continue our introduction to the topic urban planning. Are those gatherings or meetings still being held at MIT? & If so, how would I go about attending those meetings? I hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you for your time!

Respectfully yours,

Maxwell Opara

Jose -- I thought that my student Sam Rodin sent this to you, but I am sending a copy just in case....Randy

Reflections

Sam Rodin

RCC Student

I hadn't realized you and I would be the only people there with a real political bent. I think this could be a great occasion for RCC students to meet foreign professionals and discuss renewal and development--perhaps some events similar to the recent forum on youth violence would be plausible in the future. (Was Pf. Rhonda Gray involved with that?)

Most of the academics and professionals at the dinner seem to concern themselves with the How and the Why. With a political eye, I feel we should remind them of the By Whom. Dudley Square is a beautiful example of those without a strong voice speaking up for themselves, but they essentially had to resort to dirty tactics and gimmicks to get the job done. There should be serious discussion of how to get powerful interests involved with urban planning without sacrificing the people who live in the planned area. Especially at Roxbury, this is a topic I feel would generate a lot of student interest, and I think both the RCC students and the SPURS fellows would have insights. As I said at the dinner, both groups have a great deal to offer each other.

Long-term urban planning is what the fellows are primarily learned about; last-ditch renewal is something for which the Roxbury community is moderately well-renowned. Given the recent international trend in participatory democracy the fellows might find use for the immediate gain techniques Roxbury knows. Conversely, Roxbury would hardly suffer for the inclusion of the long view in the education of a generation of RCC students.

Just a few thoughts,
Sam